

21 April, 2021

Good Morning Representative Charlotte Warren and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

My name is Evie Clement, and I am testifying today in support of LD 663 *An Act To Make Comprehensive Substance Use Disorder Treatment Available to Maine's Incarcerated Population*. I am currently a student at the University of Maine in Orono. This year I have had the privilege to work as a drug policy research fellow, researching the ways stigma impacts our perception of drug use and people who use drugs, specifically the way this can create a barrier for healthcare providers to utilize Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT). That being said, I want to note that this testimony represents my own personal views and not those of the institution.

Stigma is the deep root of the 'opioid epidemic', underpinning the issue of opioid use disorder (OUD) and perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions about nearly every aspect of drug use. Although opioid use disorder is a medical condition with complex contributing factors, it is often misunderstood as a moral failure, which discredits factors such as traumatic histories, mental health, and physical and chemical brain changes that likely contribute to addiction. Because of this, biases and a lack of knowledge about OUD impact the utilization of effective treatment, even within the medical community. Although MAT is the agreed upon "gold standard" for MAT, research shows doctors certified to prescribe these medicines are hesitant to do so. Unfortunately, only 44% - 66% of providers are meeting their patient limits for providing MAT and stigma remains a barrier to ensuring treatment for those who need it. Passing this bill will support the use of evidence-based treatments and help expand its use as best practice.

Providers often cite a lack of education about OUD and MAT as a reason they do not feel comfortable providing the treatment. This is a barrier we can and should be addressing. In section F, this bill will help address stigma at the level of provider education with the requirement of ongoing training for correctional staff and healthcare providers. Provider education has been cited as a promising intervention for reducing biases and negative impacts of stigma in the treatment process. It can help providers better understand not only the treatment itself, but also the complexity of SUD and the patients they treat, which in turn helps shift interactions away from stigma and toward empathy and compassion.

Attitudes and stigma need to be addressed at all levels related to drug and treatment for SUD in order to truly support the people in our community who are suffering. While my research has focused on OUD and MAT, it is important to recognize that these attitudes can be seen with other substance use disorders as well, and many of the same strategies should be used to address and treat them. I sincerely believe this bill represents an opportunity for Maine to prioritize access to evidence-based and compassionate care and work toward reducing the negative impacts of stigma on our friends, family, and fellow Mainer's who are suffering from substance use disorders and/or are residents in our criminal justice system.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Evie Clement